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ABSTRACT

This applied dissertation reports on an intervention to develop the social skills of six cognitively gifted fourth and fifth grade students. The twice-weekly, after-school intervention was intended to address the asynchronous development of these children who experienced functional disability in social settings due to social dissonance, a limitation of experiences and opportunities, and feelings of isolation and loneliness. Curricula, lesson plans, and teaching strategies were identified and used to teach students social skills in the areas of responsibility, empathy, self-control, assertion, externalizing problems, reaching out to peers, and controlling impulsive behaviors. Subjects were evaluated on the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS) prior to and after program participation. All but one of the expected outcomes were met or exceeded. At the conclusion of the project, participating students accepted responsibility for their own actions, redirected their own impulses, compromised during conflicts, understood the way other people felt, and disagreed with others without fighting. All areas with the exception of empathy showed improvement. Appendices include the problem indicator checklist and forms used in the project. (Contains 25 references.) (DB)

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Improving the Social Skills of Fourth-and Fifth-Grade Cognitively Gifted Students

by
Sharry Kimmel
Cluster 97

An Applied Dissertation
Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Abstract

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The asynchronous development of many fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students caused them to experience functional disability in social settings. The disparity in the development of their affective and cognitive domains had created social dissonance, a limitation of experiences and opportunities, and increased feelings of isolation and loneliness. This applied dissertation was designed to improve the social skills of fourth- and fifth-grade gifted students.

The writer researched and discovered curricula, including lesson plans and teaching strategies, to teach students social skills in the areas of responsibility, empathy, self-control, assertion, externalizing problems, reaching out to peers, and controlling impulsive behaviors. Two hourly sessions per week were provided to 6 gifted students during an after-school program based on curricula addressing the affective domain. The solution strategies implemented by the writer included didactic instruction, role-play, art, outdoor play, drama, group discussions, and journal writing.

The analysis of the data showed that fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students at the writer's setting could learn social skills if they were provided the opportunity to do so. At the conclusion of this project, the students who participated in the applied dissertation accepted responsibility for their own actions, redirected their own impulses, compromised during conflicts, understood the way other people felt, and disagreed with others without fighting. All areas with the exception of empathy showed improvement.

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Permission Statement

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Approval Page

This applied dissertation took place as described.

Verifier: Linda McDaniel, Ed.D.

School Principal

This applied dissertation was submitted by Sharry Kimmel under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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"There will come a time when you

believe everything is finished.

That will be the beginning."

-Louis L'Amour

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Chapter I: Introduction

Description of Community

The setting of this applied dissertation was an urban community located in the southeastern region of the United States. With a population of 1,535,468, this community's multiethnic and multicultural diversity was represented by individuals from 152 countries who spoke 52 languages. A large percentage of the population, 76.8%, were high school graduates, while a small percentage, 18.8%, were college graduates. There was an average of 2.35 persons per household. The median household income was $33,895 per year, with 12.2% of adults aged 18 or older earning below the national poverty level and 19.8% of children living below poverty, according to census reports.

The school district was one of the fastest growing in the nation, serving the educational needs of 249,923 students. The school district was fully accredited and enrolled between 6,000 to 10,000 new students in kindergarten through Grade 12 every year. There were more than 53,000 students with special needs in the district, including 6,632 cognitively gifted students. According to the state's department of education, more than 22,000 children in the school district were enrolled in aftercare programs, and over 4,500 prekindergarten students were provided with special programs for learning readiness.

Writer's Work Setting

The setting of this applied dissertation was an elementary school serving students in kindergarten through Grade 5. The school's mission was to provide a child-centered, thought-provoking, and nurturing learning community that encouraged maximum student achievement through a multiple-intelligence approach to teaching and learning. Through partnerships with universities, job-embedded staff development

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programs, and action research, the school's staff was empowered to work collaboratively and to implement effective instructional practices that met the needs of the whole child.

The philosophy of the school was that each child be viewed as an individual with gifts and talents and, if given the appropriate environment, each child could and would succeed. The goal of the school was for all students to be successful emotionally, socially, and academically by promoting an environment that challenged them appropriately and supported them with continuity and care.

The elementary school had 964 students enrolled. There were no more than 25 students assigned to any one classroom. The student population was diverse and included Whites, 48%; Blacks, 33%; Hispanics, 13%; Asians, 3%; multiracial, 2%; and other races, 1%, according to the state's department of education.

On the state's fifth-grade norm-referenced achievement test in 2000, the mean scale score in math was 334 at the elementary school, compared to 315 district-wide. On the state's fourth-grade norm-referenced achievement test in 2000, the mean scale score in reading was 299 at the elementary school, compared to 292 district-wide. The school's first-grade norm-referenced achievement test in 2000 yielded a median percentile in mathematics of 86, compared to 63 district-wide; the reading median percentile score was 87, compared to 70 district-wide. For the second grade, the norm-referenced achievement test in 2000 yielded a median percentile score in mathematics of 82, compared to 74 district-wide; the median national percentile in reading was 76, compared to 60 district-wide, as reflected by the state's department of education.

Many of the teachers at the elementary school were engaged in collaborative action research. Four groups of 6 to 10 classroom teachers met monthly with a teacher

and facilitator to review literature on specific best teaching practices, to analyze student data and work samples, and to share their experiences in the classroom. At the end of the school year, the action research teams had the opportunity to share their experiences and to disseminate their findings among new researchers from across the district. Professors from several local universities also attended this culminating event. At this elementary school, professional collaboration and learning communities were greatly valued.

Another quality unique to the elementary school was its extensive reading tutorial program. Three times weekly, every humanities teacher (art, physical education, music, and science), as well as every administrator in the school, worked in small-group tutorial sessions with children who were reading below grade level. The instructional methodology most commonly practiced in the small-group tutorials allowed each child to take a turn reading aloud to the rest of the group in succession; however, any effective teaching practice in reading found to raise achievement for these students was acceptable.

The faculty at the school consisted of 1 principal, 1 assistant principal, and 36 regular classroom teachers. Six teachers taught at each of the six grade levels. The faculty also was composed of many educational specialists, including 1 classroom teacher for the highly cognitively gifted students, 1 teacher for the regular cognitively gifted students, and 1 varying exceptionalities teacher. One speech and language pathologist, 1 media specialist, 1 science resource teacher, 1 art teacher, 1 music teacher, 1 physical education teacher, 1 part-time technology specialist, 4 team leaders, and 1 part-time school psychologist also were employed. Approximately 9 faculty members had earned master's degrees in the field of elementary education, and several were currently pursuing doctoral degrees.

The school subscribed to shared decision-making principles and had an elected

board of directors who met weekly to make recommendations to the staff. The board of directors was composed of seven teachers (one who was the union steward), three parents, one paraprofessional, the school principal, and the chairperson of the school advisory committee. Suggestions regarding budget, policy, curriculum, and professional development involved the board of directors. The principal was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school, as well as any on-the-spot decisions necessary for maintaining, managing, and leading the school in adherence with its mission statement and philosophy.

The school had an interestingly large number of students who had qualified for, been accepted into, and attended the school's three gifted programs. The school offered a 1-hour-per-day content-based program for all cognitively gifted students in Grades 1-3 whose IQ levels were above 130. The school offered a 2-hour-per-day content-based program for cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students whose IQ levels were above 130. For fourth-and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students whose IQ levels were above 145, the school offered an all-day class. Twenty-one students were enrolled in the all-day class for cognitively gifted students, and 38 were enrolled in the two content-based programs for cognitively gifted students.

Writer's Role

The writer was employed as a specialist teacher in the area of exceptional education and taught the content-based programs for cognitively gifted students. The writer's most significant role as designer, facilitator, and instructor of the content-based programs was to provide, for 2 hours daily, structured and advanced language arts opportunities for 18 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students whose IQs ranged from 130 to 145. The writer's role also included providing, for 1 hour daily, structured

and advanced mathematics opportunities for 12 third-grade cognitively gifted students. In addition, the writer provided, for 1 hour daily, structured and advanced science opportunities for a combined group of 8 first-and second-grade cognitively gifted students.

The writer had 7 years of prior public school teaching experience in Grades 1 through 9, all in the area of education for the cognitively gifted. The writer also had 2 years of administrative experience as an assistant principal and as a principal in private schools. This breadth of experiences across grade levels, content areas, and school settings gave the writer the opportunity to serve as a teacher and a leader within the school. Although not serving on the board of directors, the writer did serve the school as an action research coach, a member of the school advisory committee, and a representative at many
district-level events.

Additional school roles and responsibilities included the writer's sponsorship of the student council organization and service as a link between the school and the local children's cancer fund-raising organization. The writer invested much afterschool time engaging children in activities that helped them acquire and practice leadership skills. By empowering children to exercise their leadership abilities, the writer believed that she was having an additional effect on the school and in the lives of students.

The writer's primary responsibility at the school was to seek out, design, and implement for her students, challenging and relevant curriculum in the applicable content areas. The writer's school district required that all grade-level competencies were met in each content area for each child and that the foundations for all exceptional education programs, including its programs for the cognitively gifted, were based on academics.

This presented the writer with a challenge because she had observed an increase in the number of individualized educational plans for cognitively gifted children, both in the content-based programs and the all-day program at her school, written to address specific student needs in the affective domain.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Statement

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was that, although the brightest fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students at the writer's work setting had excellent cognitive abilities, their social and emotional development was not synchronous with their intellectual capacity. This situation suggested the need for differentiated curricular approaches in social skills, character development, and the areas of emotional intelligence. Asynchronous development of the affective and cognitive domains among those cognitively gifted children had caused them to experience a functional disability in typical school and life situations. The disparity had created social dissonance, a limitation of experiences and opportunities, and increased feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Problem Description

Several of the brightest students who attended the school's fourth- and fifth-grade programs for the cognitively gifted were promoted from second- and third-grade programs for cognitively gifted students. Between second grade and fourth or fifth grade, a paper trail was developed on these students that followed them through the grades to document their need for intervention in the affective areas. Interestingly, the children with the most significant affective issues were the very same children with the highest IQ levels.

One cognitively gifted fourth grader who had possessed a near photographic memory since kindergarten appeared to possess little care or concern for the emotional safety and well-being of others. Two cognitively gifted fifth graders were able to complete mathematical problems at a college level but struggled to remember day-to-day

tasks and minor homework assignments. Another cognitively gifted fourth grader could compose poetry that would bring tears to a reader's eye but was unable to relate socially to her same-age peers; thus she often reverted into isolation. Another of the school's brightest fourth-grade students read between three to seven adult novels weekly, yet constantly forgot to bring his book bag to school, did not complete simple or complex classroom tasks and homework assignments, and did not relate well to same-age peers.

Some of the most capable fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students were handing in homework late or not at all. Work being produced in class was carelessly produced. For some, restroom "breaks" were becoming frequent excuses to "escape." In situations where group work was involved, bright students were refusing to work with their classmates, claiming that their classmates could not "understand" them. Another frequent scene was able students who refused to present their work to the class orally or who stood silently during a group presentation while the rest of the group took the credit for the final product. Displays of immature emotional behaviors such as temper tantrums and bouts of crying among fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students had increased over the past 2 years.

Any child capable of complex thinking yet incapable of behaving in ways deemed normal by society could experience incomprehensible frustration. The scenarios provided by the writer illustrate how asynchronous development between the cognitive and affective domains had negatively affected her brightest and most cognitively gifted students. The parents, siblings, classmates, and teachers of these children also experienced incomprehensible frustration.

To date, the social and emotional individualized educational plan goals had not been mastered for many cognitively gifted students. In some cases, the social and

emotional goals had not even been adequately addressed. With these children, the emphasis in their development and in their lives tended to rest in the cognitive domain. Mother, father, teacher, and sibling were so amazed by the child's advanced cognitive abilities that they tended to overlook the child's social and emotional shortcomings.

Another factor contributing to the lack of emphasis on the social and emotional growth of these brilliant children was the nature of programming for the cognitively gifted provided in the writer's school district. All special education opportunities provided to cognitively gifted children were required to be structured, academic, and content-based. Any social or emotional skills content was frowned upon and, therefore, rarely implemented.

In the home, the bright parents may have experienced some of the same issues that their bright children faced and, consequently, were unable to provide any guidance. The parents also may have been well aware of the social and emotional issues faced by their children but were not knowledgeable as to how or where to reach out for help. The longer the disparity continued, the deeper the gap widened between the domains. By the time the cognitively gifted child arrived at the fourth- and fifth-grade levels, the problem was observable.

Problem Documentation

The evidence that supported the existence of the problem was gathered over a 4-month period. The writer reviewed articles of evidence stored in the school's cumulative records for students with IQs above 130. The writer found articles of evidence supporting claims of lagging affective development with the many cognitively gifted children at the school. The articles of evidence continued to surface on

individualized educational plan goals that had not been met in the social skills area. The goals had been specifically written to address needs to master skills in assertion, self-control, empathy, externalizing problems, responsibility, reaching out to peers, and control of impulsive behavior.

Telephone logs stored in the student cumulative records served as another interesting form of documentation of the existence of the problem. During the course of one school year, one child's regular classroom teacher had 18 telephone communications with the parents regarding that child's emotional oversensitivity. In another case, there were six telephone communications made between a team leader and a parent regarding the child's lack of social interest with classmates. All telephone communications at the writer's school regarding student progress were required to be documented or logged and stored in the student's cumulative records. In the case of several cognitively gifted children, the quantity of telephone communications between teachers, administrators, and parents was well beyond the typical two or three annual telephone calls.

The cumulative record files of three cognitively gifted students included documentation on interim progress reports of concerns regarding the need for improved communication skills. Another two of the files included documentation of concerns on interim progress reports regarding the need to turn in homework assignments on time. One of the files included evidence of concerns regarding classroom behavior documented on the child's interim progress report. Two of the cognitively gifted students had in their cumulative reports past behavioral referrals to the front office. One of the students was referred for physically fighting with another student. The other was referred to the office for appearing tired and listless.

Causative Analysis

The problem of asynchronous development between the affective and cognitive domains of the most cognitively capable fourth- and fifth-grade students at the school had a number of possible causes. One cause appeared to be the emphasis on academics and cognitive development in the home and school environment of the students. Most of the cognitively gifted students were products of capable parents who were also cognitively gifted.

Supporting this type of causative analysis of asynchronous development, Silverman (1997) claimed the emotional and social development of children who are cognitively gifted is simply qualitatively different from their peers due to their greater cognitive awareness. She also claimed that the higher the child's IQ, the greater the asynchrony. Silverman pointed out that asynchronous literally means out of sync. With children who are cognitively gifted, the affective domain, including social skills, is significantly slower to develop, while the cognitive domain develops at a very fast rate. This slower affective development in cognitively advanced children, according to Silverman, puts them at risk, just as developmentally delayed children are at risk in a society that prizes sameness. The author noted that asynchronous development creates a sort of vulnerability among the cognitively gifted.

Social development throughout the elementary school careers of these cognitively gifted students appeared to be slow. These students tended to isolate themselves from others in social groups, almost seeming not to know how to initiate play or interaction. Freeman and Jensen (1999) found that children who were cognitively gifted have a precarious nature, and this nature tends to isolate them from others. Thus, children who are cognitively gifted often feel lonely and left out. Freeman and Jensen claimed that

excessive adult attention, as well as inadequate adult attention, increased the problem. The authors suggested that as a result of isolation or zealous adult attention, children who are cognitively gifted develop poor social skills, including lower levels of empathy and a sort of "blindness" in reading social cues.

The school's psychological reports on many of the cognitively gifted students portrayed evidence of advanced intellectual abilities during the early childhood years. Isley, O'Neil, and Parke (1999) studied relations between parental positive affect and children's social competence. They found that children who had positive affective experiences with their parents in early childhood expressed their own affect socially in positive ways with peers. Child bonding is evident as a cause for positive affect and social development among children. With children whose developmental focus tends to be on the cognitive domain, perhaps the parent bonding during the early years is different from the "normal" child, lending itself as a cause of lagging social and emotional development.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

A review of the literature reveals growing, but not new, concerns about the asynchronous development of intellectually superior children. Hollingworth (as quoted in Morelock, 1996) stated, "To have the intelligence of an adult and the emotions of a child combined in a childish body is to encounter certain difficulties" (p. 6). Hollingsworth's statement portrays the asynchronous development of children who are cognitively gifted in its truly "abnormal" fashion. Because intellectually superior children do not develop along the same path as other children, they are at risk of being viewed as different, odd, unusual, or strange by society and themselves.

Feelings of isolation and loneliness are common among cognitively gifted children. According to Freeman and Jensen (1999), children who are cognitively gifted are more likely to be introverted than their peers who are not cognitively gifted and they are twice as likely to report feelings of anxiety, stress, and other depressions than their peers who are not cognitively gifted. Further, Freeman and Jensen indicated that children with genius-level IQs are among the most likely of any group of children to use drugs to attempt suicide.

Shapiro (1997) described several "emotional qualities that appear to be important to success" (p. 18). These qualities, Shapiro continued, are "a subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and other's feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 19). Shapiro held that social intelligence could include "empathy, expressing and understanding feelings, controlling one's temper, independence, adaptability, being well-liked, interpersonal problem solving, persistence, friendliness, kindness, and respect" (p. 22). Shapiro further held that acquisition of these social skills, which, in childhood, help children to become well-liked by teachers and friends on the playground, will help these same children on the job or in relationships, such as marriage, 20 years later.

Lovecky (1997) described various case studies clearly connecting advanced moral sensitivity and the lack of social skills to handle sensitivity as an issue among children who were cognitively gifted. Hollingworth (as quoted in Morelock, 1996) gave many examples of early moral awareness among children who were cognitively gifted, such as a boy 9 years of age who cried endlessly after learning about the taxation policies of the Civil War. Is this type of a reaction normal? Is the development of advanced moral

sensitivity a positive or negative quality among children who are cognitively gifted? In the cases at the writer's elementary school, perhaps advanced moral sensitivity was the cause of the introverted behaviors for several of the cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students.

Kain and Perry (1984) found that peer contact plays a critical role in human development. With children who are cognitively gifted, those interactions can be limited; thus the child gains little practice in social reasoning. Cross (1996) found that many adolescents who were cognitively gifted and who had committed suicide had minimal prosocial outlets. A lack of prosocial activities and signs of anger or depression all served as indicators of a potential problem. Jackson (1998) also found that social inhibition was one of the major causes of depression among adolescents who were cognitively gifted.

In her study of children with IQs over 200, Morelock (1997) found that these children possess tendencies to see complexity in things that other children regard as simple. This tendency, according to Morelock, can cause children who are cognitively gifted to feel different from their same-age peers who do not see such complexities. Morelock suggested that children who are cognitively gifted develop a strong imaginative side to help acquire flexibility and coping skills that enable them to deal with real-world challenges.

When talents of students who are cognitively gifted exist in realms not addressed at school, a manifestation of social and emotional problems are likely to arise. Olenchak (1999) found in case studies of underachieving children who were cognitively gifted that underachievement interfered with sound affective development. One cause for this discrepancy, according to Olenchak, appeared to be a failed attempt by schools to collect

more detailed data than revealed by tests alone on individual students. The lack of data collected and analyzed about each individual who was cognitively gifted resulted in programs for the cognitively gifted that did not meet the actual individual needs of the specialized population that Olenchak studied. In the case of the writer's elementary school, the individual data existed; but the latitude to work on social and emotional issues did not exist.

In an interview that O'Neil (1996) had with Goleman, Goleman emphasized that one of the strongest factors of emotional intelligence is managing one's own impulsive behaviors. Goleman referred to a longitudinal preschool study at Stanford University, in which children were brought into a room and had marshmallows placed in front of each of them. The children were told they could eat one marshmallow at that time, but if they waited for the researcher to return to the room, they could have a second marshmallow. Later in life, those who had waited scored an average of 210 points higher on the SAT than those who had not waited to eat their marshmallows. The study is significant, according to Goleman in his interview by O'Neil, as it shows that children who are able to delay gratification are better at scoring well on tests that demand attention, persistence, focus, and concentration.

Goleman (1995) discussed the meaning of emotional intelligence. Goleman implied that people who are emotionally intelligent are more attuned to the subtle social signals that indicate what others need or want. The social cost of being emotionally "tone-deaf" appears to be isolation and rejection from social groups. Social isolation and rejection can lead to behavioral issues, manifestations of depression and anxiety, and withdrawal. Building levels of emotional intelligence among students who are

cognitively gifted and who are having such experiences could possibly reduce their levels of depression, anxiety, and withdrawal.

Chapter III: Anticipated Outcomes and Evaluation Instruments

Goals

Cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children with lagging social skills, especially in the areas of self-control, empathy, externalizing problems, responsibility, reaching out to peers, controlling impulsive behavior, and assertion will develop social and emotional competencies needed to cope and to thrive in a world where success is often based on human relationships.

Expected Outcomes

The following outcomes were projected for this applied dissertation:

1. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to start conversations as measured by scores on the Assertion subtest of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), Parent Form (Gresham & Elliott, 1990).

2. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to control their temper when arguing with other children as measured by scores on the Self-Control subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

3. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to understand other people's feelings as measured by scores on the Empathy subtest of the SSRS, Student Form.

4. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to

externalize their problems without the use of verbal or physical aggression as measured by scores on the Externalizing Problems subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

5. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in responsibility as measured by scores on the Responsibility subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

6. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a one frequency-level improvement in establishing successful peer interactions as measured by the Reaching Out to Peers subtest of the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman, Jensen, McCown, & Rideout, 1998).

7. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a one frequency-level improvement in their ability to control their impulsive behaviors as measured by scores on the Control of Impulsive Behavior subtest of the Self-Science EQ Assessment.

Measurement of Outcomes

The population for this applied dissertation consisted of an experimental group of 6 cognitively gifted students in Grades 4 and 5 with individualized educational plans indicating a need for social skills intervention. All had similar characteristics, such as IQs above 130, their ages, grade level, and evidence of asynchronous development between the cognitive and affective domains. The quasiexperiment design was a nonequivalent control group pretest and posttest design.

There also were 6 participants in a control group who had similar features in terms of age, IQ, and grade level. However, they did not seek out exposure to or student participation in the treatment. In addition, even though participants in the control group were cognitively gifted, they were not necessarily students at the writer's school. The

participants in the control group did not necessarily possess developmental social or emotional issues.

The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was selected as the primary measurement for this applied dissertation. It was used to measure Outcomes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The Parent Form was chosen to measure Outcomes 1, 2, 4, and 5. The Student Form was chosen to measure Outcome 3. This particular instrument was chosen because it is a system that is used frequently to assess students who experience interpersonal difficulties.

The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) included provisions for teacher, parent, and student rating scales to focus on various social skills domains. Common core behaviors were assessed from the subdomains of cooperation, assertion, and self-control. The SSRS Parent Form also measured responsibility, and the SSRS Student Form measured empathy. The writer did not administer the teacher version. The SSRS Parent Form was used as the assessment for all subsets except for empathy, which was only included in the Student Form. The writer felt that the parents would have enough objectivity and distance from the student learning experiences to be objective on their posttests.

The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) was a written assessment tool that required only 25 minutes to complete. The SSRS obtained ratings of the self-perceived frequency of social behaviors. The SSRS used a 3-point rating scale ranging from 0 to 2. A rating of 0 meant that the behavior never occurred; a rating of 1 meant that the behavior sometimes occurred; and a rating of 2 meant that the behavior occurred very often.

The SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) reported an overall coefficient alpha reliability for the Social Skills scale as .85 for females and .88 for males. The coefficient for the Elementary School Social Skills scale, as scored by female students, was .82, and by male students, was .84. Overall, gender was not an influence on scale consistency; and

the constructs measured appeared the same for males and females. The high intercorrelation of scale scores indicated the students were assessing unitary underlying constructs. Test-retest reliability was measured at a 4-week interval and evidenced temporal reliability.

According to Gresham and Elliott (1990), the SSRS correlated significantly with other similar measures, including Walker and McConnel's 1988 Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment (.75), Stephen's 1978 Social Behavior Assessment (.81), and Harter's 1978 Teacher Rating Scale (.70). These correlations indicated a strong relationship between the SSRS and similar measures of social skills functioning and self-concept but could not address the issue of directionality between the two constructs.

Outcomes 6 and 7 were measured using the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman et al., 1998). This was a written observational assessment tool for parents to self-administer. This assessment took 30 minutes to administer and 10 minutes to score. The assessment measured frequency of behaviors, as well as levels of sophistication of the behaviors.

The measurable goals written on the current individualized educational plans of the 6 participants in the experimental group that became mastered by the end of the school year would serve as another measure of the outcomes for this applied dissertation. Prior to the implementation of the applied dissertation, each of the 6 experimental group participants had at least one goal in the social skills area addressing a specific need. The mastery of the individualized educational plan goals would be decided upon at the student's annual individualized educational plan review meeting among each

participant's classroom teacher, exceptional education specialist, team leader, and the parent.

Notations on parent and teacher conference forms, telephone logs, interim progress reports, and report cards would serve as data that could be analyzed and used to measure the mastery of several of the projected outcomes. The writer, as well as the cognitively gifted student participants, all kept reflective journals during the implementation phase, which were used as another source to measure the outcomes of this applied dissertation. Anecdotal commentaries would serve as evidence of student progress.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategies

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was that, although a number of the brightest fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students at the writer's work setting had excellent cognitive abilities, their social and emotional development was not synchronous with their intellectual capacity. This situation suggested the need for differentiated curricular approaches in social skills, character development, and the areas of emotional intelligence. Asynchronous development of the affective and cognitive domains among these cognitively gifted children had caused them to be dysfunctional in typical school and life situations. The disparity had created social dissonance, a limitation of experiences and opportunities, and increased feelings of isolation and loneliness.

The literature identified many possible strategies to teach to the affective domain. Social skills and emotional intelligence interventions were plentiful throughout the literature. Solutions specifically addressed the areas of interpersonal communication skills, self-regulatory skills, emotional resilience, empathy, and responsibility.

According to Beebe and Mueller (1999), an important part of being able to participate in interpersonal relationships is one's ability to communicate. Their solution strategies included teaching individuals how to develop the ability to differentiate between hearing and listening, focusing through internal noise, and responding to let others know that they are understood. With fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students at the writer's school who were often used to having things come to them easily and were, at times, not concerned with others' views, teaching self-control when

listening, that is, not to respond or react but to really absorb and listen, was both valuable and challenging.

Schilling (1996) suggested that children have two minds, one that thinks and one that feels. Schilling claimed that when these two separate minds work together, the outcome is a balanced individual. She provided 50 lessons geared at improving the emotional mind. The section on empathy, in particular, involved interpreting mentally challenging situations and responding with emotional behaviors. With cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students at the writer's school, this curriculum offered particular appeal because it was interactive. Students were required to take another person's individual perspective during role-play and develop heightened levels of empathy.

Freeman et al. (1998) created Self-Science, an emotional intelligence curriculum especially for cognitively gifted children who appeared to lack social and emotional development. Through guidance and discovery, these students developed emotional and social competencies. As a result of reviewing the Self-Science strategies, the writer became aware that she was not the only experienced educator of the cognitively gifted with a deep concern for the emotional and social lives of those children considered to be the brightest who are attending school today. Freeman et al. not only wrote the curriculum of Self-Science but also founded the Nueva School in California specifically to address the issue of asynchronous development with cognitively gifted children.

McLaren (1997), in her strategy of using literature to learn social and emotional skills, tapped into a way for students who love to read to consider the role emotions played in stories. With cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students at the writer's school who read often, one might incorrectly assume that these children are analyzing the behaviors of the characters on their own. By reading a simple story together as a class,

these students could analyze cause-and-effect relationships together and develop empathic and emotional responses to situations.

Foster (1999) used historical situations to teach students how to empathize with figures from politics and history. At the writer's school, the strategy of analyzing historical situations was applied to current events as fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students looked at current trends and issues. Students took on the viewpoints of others while developing empathy for policymakers and the multifaceted implications of the day-to-day choices that life can bring for some.

Beebe and Mueller (1999) wrote communication skills curriculum focusing on conditioned responses to improve interpersonal communication skills. The curriculum they wrote provided students with experiences that required them to think before they acted. The idea of acting rather than reacting became paramount. Through drill and practice, cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students at the writer's school became conditioned to become more effective communicators.

Kennedy and Shukla (1998) worked with autistic children to develop communication skills. They taught severely emotionally detached autistic children to look at others while speaking, imitate other people's behaviors, and to vocalize appropriately. These strategies were implemented in the writer's applied dissertation with cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children who lacked social skills, with the hope of teaching them how to appropriately connect and communicate with others.

Kain and Perry (1984) looked at peer contact theories in the socialization process. They concurred that peer groups were the best way to provide children with opportunities to practice the rules of reciprocity and to learn social skills necessary for competent maturity and functioning. With cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children at the

writer's school whose lives focused on advanced academics and intellectual growth, time spent during the applied dissertation playing and learning social rules became a fundamental way to discover and to reinforce basic social skills.

At Helen Baller Elementary School in Camas, Washington, children who were described as being emotionally fragile used a strategy called "the worry box." According to Novick (1997), the worry box strategy allowed children to throw away their worries rather than carry them around. With cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children at the writer' s school, the worry box helped lighten up their lives a bit. Since emotionally secure children thrive in social settings, this strategy enabled these children to feel lighthearted and secure enough to play and interact.

Another way to increase a student's level of social competency is character education. Elkind and Sweet (1997) developed a curriculum for teaching character education through using the Socratic method in role-playing. Elkind and Sweet claimed that character was expressed in the kinds of choices that people made. Choices were used as the foundation for questioning and implementing Socratic discussion during implementation of the applied dissertation at the writer's school.

Description of Selected Solutions

The solution strategies that the writer implemented during this applied dissertation included role-play, expressions through art, student journal writing, questioning activities, dialogue, and games. With cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children at the writer's school whose education and development both at school and in the home had traditionally emphasized academics, the obvious solution to a lack of social competence was to educate those children in the social skills areas.

The writer hoped that by teaching skills in communication during the late elementary years, cognitively gifted students would be able to express their feelings and ideas in acceptable ways once they reached adolescence. Also, by providing "play" experiences, the writer hoped to give cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students the communication and social skills practice needed to relate to others, to form bonds, and to make friends.

According to Novick (1997), expressions through art would give emotionally sensitive elementary school-age children an outlet to communicate their feelings. Through communicating, emotionally sensitive fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted children at the writer's school would be able to exercise more self-control. Because they were indeed different, these children would learn to connect and empathize with others utilizing art, dialogue, journals, and questioning activities.

Through collaboration with other teachers of cognitively gifted students, both within and outside the writer's state, over the years three curriculum series had consistently emerged as the most outstanding for addressing social and emotional needs. These curriculum series were the Accepts Program (Walker & Walker, 1998), Emotional Intelligence: 50 Activities for Teaching EQ (Schilling, 1996), and Self-Science (Freeman et al., 1998). Each series utilized solution strategies described in the writer's review of the literature as effective teaching practices for the affective domain. Lessons from these three curricula were the focal point of the writer's intervention with cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children.

Additionally, effective teaching practices not contained in any of the three curricula, such as the Socratic method, the worry box, historical empathy, literature analysis, and playground time, were implemented. These teaching practices, described in

the writer's review of the literature, had been effective in other settings in raising levels of social skills and emotional intelligence with students who were cognitively gifted and students who were not cognitively gifted.

Report of Action Taken

The writer implemented this applied dissertation for a period of 8 months. Implementation began with the preparation for, and the delivery of, an informative parent workshop on the asynchronous development of cognitively gifted children. During the preparation phase of the parent workshop, the writer selected a variety of specific topics to focus on regarding asynchronous development. Those topics included the theory of emotional intelligence, the theory of multiple intelligences, and the domains of human development. The writer created a variety of worksheet materials and a PowerPoint presentation to correlate with each of the topics selected. Overhead slides and a take-home resource packet also were included in the materials the writer developed.

The writer then planned out how her classroom should be set up in order to facilitate cooperative learning activities among parent participants, didactic interaction between the parent participants and the writer, and the viewing of the visual presentation. Once those logistics were conceptualized, the writer followed district guidelines for requesting the use of a public facility during evening hours and school policy for reserving a classroom. The school's principal was consulted for guidance and permission as well.

Every parent of a cognitively gifted child at the school was invited to attend a parent workshop. A parent workshop invitation (see Appendix A) was sent home in each cognitively gifted child's backpack. Duplicate invitations also were mailed directly to each cognitively gifted child's home. The invitation had a tear-off portion on the bottom

used to indicate the parent's attendance response. Each parent who responded positively to the invitation received an informational telephone call prior to the workshop for the purpose of introducing the topic of asynchronous development and for getting acquainted.

Twenty-one parents attended the parent workshop. The parent workshop was presented on a Wednesday evening and lasted for approximately 3 hours. At the parent workshop, the writer presented a lecture regarding the literature about the asynchronous development of cognitively gifted children. The literature overview also was presented in the form of a PowerPoint presentation followed by a collaborative group discussion regarding the causes and effects of the phenomenon.

Despite a scheduled agenda with a rigid plan of events for the parent workshop, the largest section of time was devoted to a discussion period among the parents where the mothers and fathers shared their experiences and challenges. The parents gave examples of people in their families, often themselves, who portrayed atypical characteristics described by the literature. By the end of the evening, the workshop looked more like a support group than an educational forum. The workshop made it evident to the writer that there was a need for more parent collaboration, education, and conversation. The writer felt that the workshop had played a fundamental role in preparing a school culture that would be receptive of a paradigm change.

Over the next 3 days, follow-up calls were made to each parent who had attended the parent workshop. The follow-up calls provided the writer with an opportunity for positive feedback regarding the content of the workshop and an awareness that intervention was needed. The writer also created and mailed a newsletter to each parent who had attended. Included in the newsletter were clips from photos taken, quotes from

parents who participated, a paragraph describing several memorable moments, and a brief recap of the topics covered at the workshop.

During Month 2, the writer prepared and facilitated a second workshop for teachers on the asynchronous development of the cognitively gifted. The audience for this workshop was composed of 19 classroom teachers from the writer's elementary school and 3 teachers of cognitively gifted students representing other school sites within the district. Fliers notifying teachers of the date, time, location, and content matter were placed in the personnel mailboxes of every teacher in the school. Teachers of cognitively gifted students from other schools were personally invited to attend by the writer.

The goal of the teacher workshop was to inspire, educate, and prepare a foundation for change. The writer created a Problem Indicator Checklist (see Appendix B) for identifying cognitively gifted students at risk. The purpose of the checklist was to provide useful visuals during the workshop's cooperative learning activities and to provide the teacher participants with a resource to add to their storehouse of teaching information with regard to the asynchronous development of the cognitively gifted child. Earlier in the week, the writer also spoke at a school faculty meeting about the affective traits of cognitively gifted children in hopes of creating more interest in the teacher workshop.

The teacher workshop took place in the afternoon of an early release day during the second week. Collegial discussion focused on manifestations of social, emotional, and behavioral issues of the cognitively gifted child in the regular classroom setting. As with the parent group, the teachers took advantage of the opportunity to voice their frustrations, as well as to offer suggestions and to ask questions regarding the review of

the literature on the topic. Based on immediate feedback from several of the teachers who attended, the teacher workshop was greatly appreciated.

Following the teacher workshop, the writer attended that week's weekly grade-level team meetings at the elementary school and engaged teachers in a series of debriefing discussions. The writer also met with individual teachers that week during their teacher-planning time to address various affective behaviors of cognitively gifted children in their classrooms. One classroom teacher who was having particular issues with two of the cognitively gifted children in her classroom required assistance beyond the school day's planning period. The writer worked individually with that teacher twice at her home during the evening to consult regarding possible strategies that the teacher could explore in the regular classroom setting.

The writer developed a lending library of reading resources and materials on the topics associated with asynchronous development. The topics of the books in the lending library included emotional intelligence, multiple intelligence, emotional development, social development, cognitively gifted children. There were 45 books in the writer's collection. The writer numbered the reading materials alphabetically by author last name and developed a check-out system.

The writer made the opportunity available for parents of cognitively gifted children to learn more about asynchronous development by calling each to personally inform them about the lending library. She posted a sign in the faculty lounge and shared the news with teachers by word of mouth. The writer made herself available one morning and one afternoon each week for parents and teachers to borrow books and to discuss the literature. That practice was continued throughout the school year.

For the third month, the writer developed an experimental group of cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children who were interested in participating in social skills intervention sessions. The writer also developed a control group consisting of cognitively gifted children who would not participate in the social skills intervention sessions but would participate in the pretest and posttest measures. The control group would later be used as a comparison to help the writer account for variables, such as maturation, during this applied dissertation. Action steps during the third month of implementation included telephone calls and visits to homes and interviews with team leaders and classroom teachers in search of cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade participants.

The writer began her search for participants for both the experimental group and the control group with an inquiry letter (see Appendix C) that went out to all administrators and teachers within the elementary school asking for their assistance in identifying cognitively gifted children who lacked social skills or emotional stability. The writer requested input from all faculty members, including the physical education teacher, the art teacher, and the teacher assistants who supervised the cafeteria during lunch. The writer felt that the latter individuals had experience with the cognitively gifted students in nonacademic settings and would be able to provide valuable input.

The writer then called the parents of those children who had been identified from the contacts at the elementary school. The writer visited the homes of two of the children to further discuss the possibility with the families of participation in the experimental group. In one case where English was not spoken in the home, the writer engaged the assistance of the student to translate a letter to the parents into Vietnamese.

Ten students and their parents agreed to participate in the writer's applied dissertation as a result of telephone calls or home visits by the writer with the families of

18 cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students at the writer's school who had been identified by faculty members as potential candidates. Six of those students were placed in the experimental group. Four were placed in the control group, primarily because transportation was an issue for their parents.

The writer needed two more participants for the control group, so she asked the cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade children and their parents at a neighboring school at that school's open house whether they would be interested in participating. Two cognitively gifted fourth-grade students and their parents from the neighboring school agreed immediately, completing the experimental and the control groups.

The experimental group consisted of four girls and two boys. The control group also consisted of four girls and two boys. Two students in the experimental group were in Grade 4 and four were in Grade 5. Similarly, two students in the control group were in Grade 4 and four were in Grade 5.

The writer then prepared all student materials as per each curriculum guide to be used during sessions with the experimental group. Each lesson to be implemented during Months 5 through 8 was reviewed carefully by the writer to find out what items would need to be purchased or created in advance. The materials that the writer created included charts, posters, overhead slides, journal pages, hands-on manipulative materials, art examples for each art-based project, and patterns for costumes.

Toward the end of the third month, the writer sought out, found, and made contact with a local Holocaust survivor. With the 82-year-old Holocaust survivor's permission, the writer conducted a videotaped interview with him. The videotape was later used during the writer's work with the experimental group.

As the writer entered the fourth month of the implementation, she reviewed each experimental group participant's individualized educational plan, as well as cumulative records. The writer was evaluating each child for written evidence of asynchronous development. Examples of evidence found by the writer included letters of concern to or from current or past teachers, letters of concern to or from parents, current goals listed on the student's individualized educational plan that addressed social or emotional behaviors or skills, notations on current or old report cards addressing social or emotional needs, reports from a private or school child psychologist, and behavioral referral forms. The writer established portfolios on each child consisting of any and all such documentation.

All parents and students in the control and the experimental groups attended a baseline data collection session one evening after school in the school's media center. All parents of students in the control and the experimental groups read and signed Parent Consent Forms. All students in the control and the experimental groups read and signed Child Assent Forms. The parents of students in the control and the experimental groups then completed the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman et al., 1998) and Gresham and Elliott's (1990) SSRS, Parent Form, while all students in the control and experimental groups completed Gresham and Elliot's SSRS, Student Form. To ensure privacy, the students were each seated separately behind private study area, and the parents were seated separately at their own tables.

The next day, the writer reviewed the baseline data and used the data to place the experimental group students on a continuum of needs in the particular social skills areas addressed. Knowing each child's strengths and weaknesses allowed the writer to concentrate lessons on specific needs during the implementation period. The writer also

used the baseline data to plan each individual student's role and responsibility for the experimental group sessions.

The next activity consisted of an informal informational meeting for the parents of the experimental group students. The meeting took place at the writer's home one evening after school. At least one parent for each student participant attended. During the meeting, the writer reviewed the agenda, explained the curriculum materials, and shared the timeline of events that she would be using with the students participating in the experimental group. Following the informal meeting, the writer established an electronic mailing list so that the parents of the experimental group participants could network and communicate as needed with each other, as well as with the writer. To establish the electronic mailing list, the writer acquired the assistance of a colleague who had expertise in informational technology. Several of the parents used the electronic mailing list to make car-pooling arrangements for the after school sessions. The writer used the electronic mailing list to remind parents of the time and date for each upcoming session with the experimental group students.

The writer began working with the group of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted student participants at the school during the fifth month. Twice each week the experimental group met with the writer after school. The goal of the fifth month was to empower the children in the experimental group with communication skills. Students needed improved communication skills to externalize problems, to reach out to peers, and to assert themselves in life. Each small-group session, two weekly, consisted of 20 minutes of didactic interaction followed by 40 minutes of practice. Practice included role-play experiences, games, and cooperative learning exercises, all with a focus on communication. Each session ended with closing remarks, group discussion, and a

reflective journal writing assignment. The writing assignments were given at the same time after each session and always required the application of newly acquired skills at home or in the classroom setting.

The first communication lesson was a role-play activity called "communication counts" during which students were able to brainstorm, learn, and practice effective ways to send and receive messages. This was a 50-minute intervention, and it was implemented during one of the two after school sessions during the first week of the month. During communication counts, students learned basic communication skills, such as eye contact, smiling, body language, and paraphrasing.

The students then participated in a 50-minute circle-sharing activity called "once when someone wouldn't listen to me" and defined and examined failed communications. The students learned how to negotiate through communication in a group decision-making activity called "donor dollars," in which they communicated various ways to spend significant amounts of money to everyone's liking. After that, the students reviewed donor dollars as they participated in more conflict-resolution role-play activities as listed in Freeman et al.'s (1998) Self-Science curriculum.

Communication skills were reinforced as students played together on the playground. Students completed the unit on communication with a story that could have three possible endings to its conflict. The students problem solved and, through each possible ending, discovered why problem solving was preferable to denial and confrontation. During the unit's final activity, each student listed examples of incidents from the past where they could have applied their newfound skills if they had known them at the time. The students also charted and predicted incidences when they believed they would use their newfound skills in the future.

For Month 6, the writer concentrated on the skills of self-control and responsibility. The experimental group met twice weekly for 1-hour sessions to develop self-management skills in those areas. The first 20 minutes of the small-group sessions consisted of didactic interaction followed by 40 minutes of role-play, literature analysis, or Socratic discussions applied to self-control and responsibility. The students did not seem particularly interested in participating in the role-play activities. Since all sessions were conducted after school, participants appeared, at times, to be tired. Sustaining relevance and interest was a challenge for the writer based on the after school time frame. The time frame also presented itself as a problem for some parents who had difficulties retrieving their children at 4:30 p.m. due to later working hours and other issues.

The unit on self-control and responsibility began with an examination of feelings, such as anger. The students examined ways to control their emotions during intense situations. Interestingly, the students offered each other ideas and suggestions as to how to cope with anger; and the comments were well-received, perhaps because their peers had generated them.

The students learned a basic four-step decision-making process through a role-play activity known as "finding a new nest." During that activity, the students imagined how it felt to be uprooted from one's home. Participants then practiced decision-making and learned to identify alternatives in decision-making situations through an activity known as "decisions, decisions, decisions."

The experimental group learned another self-regulatory technique known as "self-talk." Self-talk required the students to analyze various situations in their own minds, aloud, and in writing. Several students admitted that they frequently engaged in self-talk when problem solving, and one participant voiced a concern that he analyzed

situations in his mind with too much frequency and intensity. Others found the strategy useful, especially the two aggressive students who were working on controlling their impulsive behaviors.

The experimental group students also explored the ramifications of decisions people made through the exploration of current events and classic children's literature materials. The book The lorax by Dr. Seuss, for example, was used for the self-talk activity. Students were asked to analyze decisions made by the main characters of the book and to explore the possibilities of alternative choices in those situations. Self-talk activities also consisted of role-play, journal sharing, and discussions.

Responsibility was covered next, as well as self-control. The experimental group conducted literature analyses on classic children's literature books, such as The Little Engine that Could by Piper and Sanderson, and identified responsible characters and defined responsible actions. The experimental group learned to accept responsibility through a procedure called "time diary experiment," where they looked at robotic time and pattern behaviors around them. The experimental group kept time logs, charts, and graphic organizers of their daily responsibilities and the completion of those responsibilities by studying their own behaviors at home and in the regular classroom to determine when they were being passive, assertive, or aggressive. Students then used drama as they worked in cooperative learning groups and planned and performed skits about striving for excellence. The students participated in Socratic Paideia discussions revolving around the theme of responsibility.

The writer, during Month 7, concentrated on developing increased levels of empathy among the experimental group. Small group discussion, role-play, current event analyses, and art were the mediums used twice weekly in the writer's attempt to teach

empathy. Experimental group students were encouraged through various lessons to become more attuned to their emotional states, as well as to those of others.

During the empathy section of implementation, both the first and second 1-hour sessions consisted of a lesson called "act out." During act out, participants took on the roles of others during dramatizations and discussions. During the first session, students interpreted feelings elicited from listening to classical music. Later, the student experimental group interpreted other people's feelings in scenarios as they participated in a lesson called "reach out" to describe relationships between events and emotional reactions.

The experimental group dramatized situations during "dare to care" lessons as they practiced empathic, caring behaviors in a variety of scenarios. The group then progressed and created their own "worry boxes" to develop emotional resilience and empathy for others. One participant revealed that her worry box came to have special meaning for her, and she kept it next to her bed and put her worries in the box every night before going to sleep. She claimed to have found that by performing this nightly ritual, she slept more soundly.

The final month began with the experimental group observing the videotaped interview with the Holocuast survivor, in which he relayed his real-life stories of tragedy and triumph. Each student reacted to the guest's stories during a debriefing session. One girl was particularly emotional regarding the Holocaust survivor's experiences and shared her grandmother's survival story with the group. The students engaged in careful and sensitive conversation as they debriefed.

The implementation phase was concluded with data collection and review and posttest administration. All parents and students in the control and the experimental

groups attended a posttest administration meeting one evening after school in the school's media center. All parents of students in the control and experimental groups completed the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman et al., 1998) and Gresham and Elliott's (1990) SSRS, Parent Form, while all students in the control and experimental groups completed Gresham and Elliott's SSRS, Student Form. As with the pretests, to ensure privacy, the students were each seated separately behind private study carousels; and the parents were seated separately at their own tables.

Individual meetings were held after school at the writer's classroom with parents of the experimental and the control group students to review the pretest and posttest scores if requested; however, findings and inferences could not be made until the final statistical analyses were finished. The writer met with each cognitively gifted student participant in the experimental group on an individual basis during her teacher-planning hour to review their individual experiences as well.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem to be solved in this applied dissertation was that, although the brightest fourth- and fifth-grade students at the writer's work setting had excellent cognitive abilities, their social and emotional development was not synchronous with their intellectual capacity. This situation suggested the need for differentiated curricular approaches in social skills, character development, and the areas of emotional intelligence. Asynchronous development of the affective and cognitive domains among those cognitively gifted children had caused them to experience a functional disability in typical school and life situations. The disparity had created social dissonance, a limitation of experiences and opportunities, and increased feelings of isolation and loneliness.

With fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted children at the writer's school whose education and development both at school and in the home had traditionally emphasized academics, the obvious solution to a lack of social competence was to educate those children in the social skills areas. The solution strategies that the writer implemented during this applied dissertation included role-play, expressions through art, student journal writing, questioning activities, dialogue, and games.

The Accepts Program (Walker & Walker, 1998), Emotional Intelligence: 50 Activities for Teaching EQ (Schilling, 1996), and Self-Science (Freeman et al., 1998) were the three curricula used as the focal point of the writer's intervention with fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted children. Solutions specifically addressed the areas of interpersonal communication skills, self-regulatory skills, emotional resilience, empathy, and responsibility. The goal of this applied dissertation was to help

fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students develop the competencies needed to cope and to thrive in a world where success is often based on human relationships.

The specific outcomes of this applied dissertation were the following:

1. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to start conversations as measured by scores on the Assertion subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

This outcome was met. The Assertion subtest on the SSRS, Parent Form, measured specifically whether the fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students who participated in the experimental group started conversations with other class members rather than waiting for others to talk first. Assertion scores increased ($t = -3.873$, $p < .1$; see Table 1). Additionally, 2 of the 6 fourth- and fifth-grade gifted students who had participated in the intervention had mastered their annual goals on the individualized educational plans pertaining to assertion. The writer's anecdotal journal entries also reflect changes in student behaviors during small group meetings. Two students, in particular, became quite outspoken during experimental group discussions and were actually assuming various leadership roles within the experimental group.

2. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to control their temper when arguing with other children as measured by scores on the Self-Control subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

This outcome was met. Gresham and Elliot (1990) defined self-control as the ability of individuals to control their temper in conflict situations. The SSRS, Parent Form, measured the ability of an experimental group of cognitively gifted

Table 1

SSRS Subtest Paired Sample Tests

Subscale	M	SD	SEM	t	p
Assertion	-2.00	1.2649	.5164	-3.873	.012*
Self-Control	-4.500	.8367	.3416	-13.175	.000*
Empathy	-1.1667	1.3292	.5426	-2.150	.084
Externalizing Problems	-2.6667	1.0328	.7149	-3.730	.014*
Responsibility	-2.6667	1.0328	.4216	-6.325	.001*

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

fourth- and fifth-grade experimental group students to specifically control their temper when arguing with other children.

Self-control increased ($t = -13.175$, $p < 0.00$) on the Self-Control subtest (see Table 1). Additionally, 3 of the fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted experimental group students who had been experiencing documented behavioral difficulties in the area of self-control prior to this study had documented evidence of improvements in that area on parent-teacher conference forms during the implementation period.

3. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to understand other people's feelings as measured by scores on the Empathy subtest of the SSRS, Student Form.

This outcome was not met. Gresham and Elliott (1990) describe empathy as a behavior that shows concern and respect for the feelings and viewpoints of others. The SSRS, Student Form, specifically measured the understanding of the feelings of other people and called it empathy. Empathy scores did not reflect change (see Table 1). The lack of improvement was primarily due to the experimental group's small sample size and the moderate level of the initial baseline pretest scores.

Parent-teacher conference forms and individualized educational plans, including documentation of a need for development in the area of empathy, were not revisited during the implementation period of this applied dissertation. This may infer that the need for development in that area was not accurate, which could be further substantiated by the students' moderate pretest scores.

4. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in their ability to externalize their problems without the use of verbal or physical aggression as measured by scores on the Externalizing Problems subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

This outcome was met. The problem section of the SSRS included a subscale for externalizing problems by resolving conflicts peacefully rather than using verbal or physical aggression toward others. Student demonstrations of the use of conflict resolution skills and engagement in compromise during moments of conflict for externalization of problems increased ($t = -3.730$; $p < .014$; see Table 1). One parent observed that her child had taken on the role of family peacemaker in the home and was actually helping her other two siblings resolve conflicts peacefully in that environment. Additionally, goals in the area of conflict resolution were mastered and documented

during the annual reviews of 2 children participants during the implementation phase of this applied dissertation.

5. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a 2-point improvement in responsibility as measured by scores on the Responsibility subtest of the SSRS, Parent Form.

This outcome was met. The SSRS indicated that students experienced increased levels of responsibility ($t = -6.325$, $p < .001$; see Table 1). The writer's journal documented an increase in student responsibility as all 6 children remembered to complete their weekly reflections at home and to bring them to the next experimental group session. Student increases in responsibility also were documented by an increase in the amount of classroom homework being submitted to the regular classroom teachers in all six cases. Parents also had observed greater participation in household chores and responsibilities in four cases.

6. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a one frequency-level improvement in establishing successful peer interactions as measured by the Reaching Out to Peers subtest of the Self-Science EQ Assessment.

This outcome was met. The Self-Science EQ Assessment measured specifically whether or not the targeted fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students reached out and participated in social engagements with their peers. The measured ability of the experimental group students to reach out to their peers improved significantly ($t = -7.746$, $p < .001$; see Table 2) on the Reaching Out to Peers subtest.

Table 2

EQ Assessment Subtest Paired Sample Tests

Subscale	M	SD	SEM	t	p
Reaching Out to Peers	-2.0000	.6325	.2582	-7.746	.001*
Control of Impulsive Behavior	-1.5000	1.0488	.4282	-3.503	.017*

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Parent observations also revealed significant improvement in student ability to reach out to others in two cases. The parents of one student reported that their child requested to join the Boy Scouts in order to meet more friends. Upon doing so, the child was reaching out to the other boys in the group and making friends. In another case, a student reached out to the other children in her class at her new school by inviting them all to her birthday party. When all of them actually attended, the child was able to easily play the role of the perfect hostess.

7. Four of 6 fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students participating in the experimental group will show at least a one frequency-level improvement in their ability to control their impulsive behaviors as measured by scores on the Control of Impulsive Behavior subtest of the Self-Science EQ Assessment.

This outcome was met. The Self-Science EQ Assessment provided a behavior rating for demonstration of frequency of behavior for controlling impulsive behaviors.

The measured ability of the experimental group's fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students to control impulsive behavior significantly improved ($t = -3.503$, $p < 0.17$; see Table 2).

Four parents reported observations of decreased tantrum behaviors. Three students were observed as demonstrating an increased ability to control impulsive behavior as documented on the positive telephone calls home section of the telephone logs of their regular classroom teachers.

Discussion

Overall, the fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students in the experimental group improved their social skills markedly, and the project was a success. The entire applied dissertation implementation process proved to be a very positive experience for this writer and for all the students, parents, and teachers who participated. By the conclusion of the applied dissertation, this writer observed a genuine fellowship, spirit, and camradery among participants.

To summarize, the experimental group had 7 outcome measures: 5 were derived from the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), 4 from the Parent Form, and 1 from the Student Form. Two outcome measures were derived from the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman et al., 1998). In a series of paired pretest and posttest t tests, which compared the experimental group of students on the SSRS subscales, significant findings of positive change and improvement occurred in all areas except empathy. Assertion scores increased ($t = -3.873$, $p < .1$), self-control increased ($t = -13.175$, $p < 0.00$), externalization of problems increased ($t = -3.730$, $p < .014$), and responsibility increased ($t = -6.325$, $p < .001$). Comparing the pre-test and post-test scores of the cognitively gifted students who participated in the experimental group using the Self-Science EQ

Assessment subscales, the measured frequency of the those students in reaching out to their peers improved significantly ($t = -7.746$, $p < .001$), and their measured ability to control their impulsive behavior significantly improved as well ($t = -3.503$, $p < 0.17$), as reflected on the paired sample tests.

Empathy scores did not reflect change primarily due to the moderate level of the initial baseline scores. Also, it is possible that student self-perception as having an increased ability to understand other people's feelings did not increase, while actual frequency of those behaviors did. The writer used the Student Form of the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) to measure empathy because empathy was not a social skill measured on the Parent Form.

The writer chose the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) and the Self-Science EQ Assessment (Freeman et al., 1998) instruments because they were well-known and included subtests measuring the issues relevant to this applied dissertation. The writer found it difficult to separate each subscale from the whole instrument. Separating the subscales was necessary to process the data for each outcome objective. Looking back, the writer believes that an entirely separate instrument should have been used to measure each outcome objective individually.

Also, the sample size in this applied dissertation was a concern because it was so small. According to Borg, Gall, and Gall (1996), "The general rule in quantitative research is to use the largest sample size possible" p. 229. Traditional sample sizes use a minimum of 30 participants; however, in this case, there were only 6 used. The reason for the small number was the limited population of cognitively gifted students at the writer's school who were willing to participate. Perhaps these research findings,

especially in the area of empathy, would have been different had the sample size been larger.

There was no statistically significant change in any of the subscale scores for the cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students in the control group. The stability of their scores was such that there was no notable change in any direction of the subscales. Had the sample size been larger, perhaps the findings would have been different. One must infer cautiously that the intervention program alone was responsible for the positive and beneficial changes in the experimental group.

No observable differences were apparent between the improved behaviors of female participants in the experimental group and improved behaviors in male participants in the experimental group. Because the sample size was so small, and only two males were included in each group, the writer summarized that in all areas except empathy the entire experimental group improved, including both female and male participants.

Annecdotal observations as well as documented improvements on individualized educational plans, parent-teacher observation forms, teacher telephone logs, and the writer's journal entries for all the experimental group participants further substantiate the results of the quantitative analysis. Documents such as letters of thanks written to the writer from parents and classroom teachers provided further gratification for the writer for the work done. The events that took place during small group sessions, as well as the positive interactions between the parents, teachers, and students, were quite rewarding.

One particular event that demonstrated the positive spirit of the applied dissertation was when a cognitively gifted fourth-grade experimental group participant, during the seventh month of implementation, experienced a dramatic increase in her

social acceptance by peers. The child's mother called the writer at home to boast about the child's receipt of the "most improved socially" award at the school. The child received recognition from the school's principal, and the parent credited this success to the child's new awareness and social skills. This same child, who did not have a birthday party in school that year because she was not well-liked by the children in her class, had a belated party at her home; and her entire class did attend!

The writer attributes much of the positive results of this applied dissertation to the close, personal relationships she was able to build with the families, teachers, and students who participated in this study. Those relationships provided the writer with the support, trust, and respect of the participants as she proceeded with the implementation of this applied dissertation. Without those bonds, the writer does not feel that she would have been able to reach the experimental group of fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted participants in the way that she was indeed able to reach them. Without the personal connection the writer had with the students, their teachers, and their parents, the writer does not believe that she would have had as great an effect on the students.

The writer also attributes much of the positive results of this applied dissertation to the planning involved with regard to the curriculum, measurement instruments, and the students who participated. The writer derived from the literature the core areas that she found were social or emotional issues with her cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students. She then was able to find a group of 6 students who had social or emotional issues in those areas and who were willing to participate in this experimental study, as well as 6 students to compare as a control group. She sought out and implemented an outstanding curriculum that addressed those same areas. That curriculum, in turn, was aligned with what was measured on the pretests and posttests. Had this applied

dissertation not been as succinct, perhaps the results would not have been as significant as they were overall.

The writer's own inner passion to make a difference in the lives of the cognitively gifted children who participated in this applied dissertation was a driving force that had an effect on the results as well. The writer approached the challenges presented by her cognitively gifted fourth- and fifth-grade students who presented lagging social skills, especially in the areas of empathy, self-control, responsibility, cooperation, communication, and assertion, with drive, determination, and enthusiasm. Her strong belief that mastery of social and emotional competencies needed to cope and thrive in the world would offer her students happier and more productive lives as adults provided a high-energy level to her work, as well as purpose and meaning to its implementation.

Recommendations

Based on classroom misbehaviors, regular classroom teachers have indicated the need to increase the social skills levels of fourth- and fifth-grade cognitively gifted students. Parents of these students have indicated their frustration regarding the lack of knowledge as to how to work with their children on these issues at home. The writer suggests that each program for the gifted, whether content-based, enrichment, or whole classroom, build in a component to address the social and emotional needs of these bright children.

The writer also suggests that parents of cognitively gifted children who attend school at the writer's work site develop a network and meet regularly to discuss issues, problems, and solutions regarding the social and emotional development of their children. The workshop provided by the writer could be used as a springboard for future meetings.

Perhaps parents could even collaborate their resources and bring guest speakers and behavioral specialists into the mix at the parent meetings.

When educators know, based on research and experience, that children who are cognitively gifted have special social and emotional needs, and yet district policies only address the cognitive needs of those children participating in programs for the cognitively gifted, conflicts are sure to emerge. The writer suggests that districts refine their policies regarding the advanced academic programs for the gifted and include ways to address the needs of the whole child, not just the cognitive piece.

A final recommendation involves the school guidance counselor providing small-group sessions for cognitively gifted students. Perhaps as part of that professional role and responsibility, the guidance counselor could offer opportunities for these students to learn and practice social and emotional skills in small-group settings during the school day. This suggestion would not interrupt the academic programs if policies could not be changed, yet would address the needs of cognitively gifted children from within the school setting.

Dissemination

Results of the applied dissertation will be shared with the board of directors at the writer's elementary school in hopes of embedding the solution strategies into the school's two programs for the cognitively gifted during the school day. Contents of the applied dissertation also will be shared with the district's exceptional education department, as well as with all teachers of the gifted throughout the district. The writer will explore the possibility of presenting a follow-up workshop on the asynchronous development of children who are cognitively gifted to the school's PTA, including a review of this entire applied dissertation and its findings.

The writer has a keen interest in embedding social skills instruction into programs for cognitively gifted children throughout the country. Postimplementation, the writer intends to submit an abstract of the applied dissertation to Gifted Child Today, Gifted Child Quarterly, and Roeper Review. If any interest emerges on behalf of the publications, the writer will craft an article for publication based on her experience with this applied dissertation.

The writer has served as a presenter of other topics at the annual conference for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The writer plans to use that past experience as she presents the topic of the asynchronous development of cognitively gifted children at the next national conference for the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). The writer also plans to contact other researchers in the field of education for the cognitively gifted who have made contributions to the field in the area of social and emotional development in hopes of networking. She and her advisor, Dr. Kathleen Kardaras, will also possibly co-present at an annual conference for the NAGC someday in the future.

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Appendix A

Parent Workshop Invitation

Who: YOU!

What: You are invited to attend a parent workshop about your gifted child.

When: The workshop will be held next Wednesday evening at 6:30 p.m.

Where: The workshop will be held in the school media center

Why: Please visit to learn, to chat, to meet other parents of gifted children, and to spend a night away from the kids and out of the house.

The parent workshop will help you answer the following questions:

1. Why doesn't my gifted child listen to me?
2. Why is my gifted child so sensitive sometimes?
3. Why does my gifted child become so easily upset?
4. Why doesn't my gifted child share his or her life with me?
5. Why doesn't my gifted child have friends?
6. Why is my gifted child so different from other children?

If you plan to attend, please complete information below and have your child return the form to Mrs. Kimmel this week. I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

Sharry Kimmel, M.Ed.
Teacher of the Gifted

Yes, I will attend the parent workshop!

Parent's Name:_____
Name of Child: _____
Child's Grade Level: _____
Child's Classroom Teacher: _____
Child's Teacher of the Gifted: _____

Appendix B

Problem Indicator Checklist

Your Name: _____ Date: _____
Relationship to Child: _____
Name of Child: _____

Problem Indicator Checklist

Please indicate below if the gifted child manifests evidence of social or emotional problems.

_____ This child does NOT have after-school friends to play with.

_____ This child experiences frequent temper tantrums at home.

_____ This child fights with other children.

_____ This child sulks often.

_____ This child appears anxious around other children his or her own age.

_____ This child does NOT follow through with his or her household responsibilities.

_____ This child does NOT follow through with his or her school responsibilities.

_____This child acts impulsively, then often regrets his or her actions later.

_____ This child does not seem to care about other people.

_____ This child is afraid to ask questions.

_____ This child is shy or aloof.

_____ This child is quiet around new people.

_____ This child acts before thinking.

_____ This child has been referred to the school office for behavior problems.

_____ This child refuses to participate in group activities.

_____ This child often seems overly absorbed in academics.

Appendix C

Inquiry Letter

Staff Inquiry

There are many children at this school who currently attend one of our gifted programs. Below are several indicators of social or emotional problems gifted children may exhibit. Do you know a gifted child at this school who manifests evidence of social or emotional problems?

1. The child does NOT have after-school friends to play with.
2. The child experiences frequent temper tantrums at home.
3. The child fights with other children.
4. The child sulks often.
5. The child appears anxious around other children his or her own age.
6. The child does NOT follow through with his or her household responsibilities.
7. The child does NOT follow through with his or her school responsibilities.
8. The child acts impulsively, then often regrets his or her actions later.
9. The child does not seem to care about other people.
10. The child is afraid to ask questions.
11. The child is shy or aloof.
12. The child is quiet around new people.
13. The child acts before thinking.
14. The child has been referred to the school office for behavior problems.
15. The child refuses to participate in group activities.
16. The child often seems overly absorbed in academics.

If you know of any gifted child at this school who manifests evidence of social or emotional problems, please let me know by writing the child's name in the space below. Please complete and return this form to my mailbox as soon as possible.

Thank you,

Sharry Kimmel

I am concerned about this gifted child:

_____

(Name of gifted child attending this school)

_____ _____

Your Name and Job Title (May be left blank if you choose) Today's Date

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